

WATCH OUT FOR GOVERNMENT IMPOSTERS

To reduce the possibility of investors falling victim to fraud, securities regulators across the United States, including the Securities Division in Arizona, urge the public to verify licensure and product information before handing over any money. Now, scam artists are doing the same—only with different intentions. Clad with official-sounding agency names and authentic-looking websites, scam artists cloak themselves in the garb of legitimacy to steal your hard-earned savings.

The ploy, of course, is to appear legitimate in order to gain your trust. But appearances can be deceiving. Be aware of a growing list of fake agency names: the Regulatory Compliance Commission, the International Regulatory Commission, the International Compliance Commission, the International Shareholder Protection Division and the International Exchange Regulatory Commission, and even the International Center for Fraud Control.

According to the National Association of Securities Administrators (NASAA), each of these fake entities had websites and listed contact information in the United States. Here's the catch: none of the organizations had any legitimate ties to real regulatory agencies or organizations.

Some of the methods con artists employ include:

- Offering investors a stock buy-back program for under-performing stock,
- Providing investors with hot stock tips that are guaranteed to make the investor a bundle of cash,
- Perpetrating an advance-fee scam by persuading investors to make payments into U.S. bank accounts before funneling the money offshore, and
- Promising to recover funds for investors who already have been scammed.

To assist investors in recognizing a bogus regulator, NASAA issued the following warning signs:

1. No references on any other regulatory websites. If you cannot find information about the "regulator" on the site of the

International Organization of Securities Commissions,
www.iosco.org, it's probably not legitimate.

2. Endorsement an investment opportunity, stock, or company.
Legitimate regulators are not in the business of promoting any investment deal or specific investment product. The mission of the Securities Division is to enforce Arizona's securities laws and ensure fair dealing among licensed financial professionals and their firms.
3. Investor pays a fee to "release restricted shares" or recover stolen funds. State regulators do not facilitate these types of transactions, nor do they charge fees to investors for the recovery of stolen funds. While the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission does regulate the sale of restricted stock, it does not charge a fee to investors.
4. Little or no information about the "regulator" appears in Internet search engines. Utilizing any Internet search should produce multiple entries. If you come up empty-handed, steer clear. To find a legitimate regulator go to www.nasaa.org and click on "contact your state regulator."
5. Verification yields no confirmation. If you call the Commission's Securities Division to check to see if an organization is legitimate and you receive the report that no such name exists, you are more than likely dealing with a phony entity.

Caution for Investors

Entrusting your money with someone for investment purposes, while expecting a profit through the efforts of others, may involve a security and sales agents/dealers subject to registration. **VERIFY BEFORE YOU BUY!** Call the Securities Division, (602) 542-4242, toll free (866) VERIFY-9 (837-4399). The Division's investor education web site also has helpful information at www.azinvestor.gov.